

KONRAD H. JARAUSCH

Cooperation or Intervention?: Kurt Riezler and the Failure of German *Ostpolitik*, 1918

Confronted with the enigma of revolutionary Russia, Imperial Germany vacillated between a policy of official cooperation and one of counterrevolutionary intervention after the treaty of Brest-Litovsk. In search of the reasons for this ambivalence, Western scholars have explored the ironies of the “unholy alliance” between Kaiser and commissar.¹ Somewhat embarrassed for owing their survival to German autocracy, Soviet writers have praised Lenin’s cleverness in exploiting the contradictions within the imperialist camp.² In West Germany, after decades of complacent anticommunism, Fritz Fischer in his *Griff nach der Weltmacht* has charged that rapacious Wilhelmian war aims “found their logical fulfillment in Brest-Litovsk and its supplementary treaties.”³ While his conservative critics such as Gerhard Ritter have blamed annexationist excesses on the hypertrophy of militarism,⁴ younger historians

1. Gerald Freund, *Unholy Alliance: Russian-German Relations from the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk to the Treaty of Berlin* (London and New York, 1957); E. H. Carr, *German-Soviet Relations Between the Two World Wars, 1919–1939* (Baltimore, 1951); Lionel Kochan, *Russia and the Weimar Republic* (Cambridge, 1954); and Z. A. B. Zeman, *The Gentlemen Negotiators* (New York, 1971).

2. I. K. Kobliakov, *Von Brest bis Rapallo* (Berlin, 1956); V. G. Briunin, “Sovetsko-germanskie otnosheniia nakanune Noiabr'skoi revoliutsii,” in V. D. Kul'bakin, *Noiabr'skaia revoliutsiia v Germanii* (Moscow, 1960); and A. A. Achtamzian, *Ot Bresta do Kilia* (Moscow, 1963).

3. Fritz Fischer, *Griff nach der Weltmacht* (Düsseldorf, 1961; rev. ed., 1964), pp. 752 ff.; trans. and abr. as *Germany's Aims in the First World War* (New York, 1967), pp. 563 ff. For the subsequent controversy see Imanuel Geiss, *Der polnische Grenzstreifen, 1914–1918* (Lübeck, 1960); K. H. Janssen, *Macht und Verblendung: Kriegszielpolitik der deutschen Bundesstaaten, 1914–1918* (Göttingen, 1963); Bernhard Mann, *Die baltischen Länder in der deutschen Kriegszielpublizistik, 1914–1918* (Tübingen, 1965); Gerd Linde, *Die deutsche Politik in Litauen im Ersten Weltkrieg* (Wiesbaden, 1964); and Fritz T. Epstein's interpretative essays, “Die deutsche Ostpolitik im Ersten Weltkrieg,” *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, 10 (1962): 381–94, and “Neue Literatur zur Geschichte der Ostpolitik im Ersten Weltkrieg,” *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, 14 (1966): 63–94.

4. Gerhard Ritter, *Staatskunst und Kriegshandwerk*, vol. 4: *Die Herrschaft des deutschen Militarismus und die Katastrophe von 1918* (Munich, 1968), pp. 316 ff. See also Ernst W. Graf Lynar, *Deutsche Kriegsziele, 1914–1918* (Frankfurt, 1964); James Joll, “The 1914 Debate Continues,” *Past and Present*, 34 (1966): 100 ff.; Wolfgang J. Mommsen, “Die deutschen Kriegszielpolitik, 1914–1918: Bemerkungen zum Stand der Diskussion,” in *Kriegsausbruch, 1914*, German book edition of the *Journal of Contemporary History* (Munich, 1967), pp. 60–100; and Wolfgang Schieder, *Erster Weltkrieg: Ursachen, Entstehung und Kriegsziele* (Cologne, 1969).

such as Winfried Baumgart have argued less emotionally that the Brest diktat was a compromise whose "indecision is ultimately responsible for the confusion of German Eastern policy." Stressing the "bitter struggle between the imperial government and the Supreme Command" and the "human element" involved, this carefully crafted interpretation has exonerated General Ludendorff's "megalomania" by emphasizing Foreign Secretary Kühlmann's desire for "a true peace of reconciliation."⁵ East German commentators have criticized Baumgart's personalistic and Manichean view for slighting the *Machtpolitik* of the Foreign Office and underplaying the structural constraints on Wilhelmian decisions.⁶ To resolve the apparent contradiction of its goals and reveal the reasons for its ultimate failure, German Eastern policy must be analyzed not only by frankly looking at its power-political purpose but also by relating it to the larger sociopolitical matrix.

The recently discovered diary of Kurt Riezler, the first secretary of the German embassy in Moscow, provides provocative evidence for such a critical reappraisal.⁷ Riezler, Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg's intimate adviser, was a young Legationsrat who possessed a brilliant mind capable of critical reflec-

5. Winfried Baumgart, *Deutsche Ostpolitik, 1918: Von Brest-Litowsk bis zum Ende des Ersten Weltkrieges* (Vienna and Munich, 1966); idem, *Von Brest-Litowsk zur deutschen Novemberrevolution: Aus den Tagebüchern, Briefen und Aufzeichnungen Alfons Paquets, Wilhelm Groeners und Albert Hopmans, März bis November 1918* (Göttingen, 1970); together with Konrad Repgen, eds., *Brest-Litowsk* (Göttingen, 1969); and the most revealing subtle apologia, "Brest-Litowsk und Versailles: Ein Vergleich zweier Friedensschlüsse," *Historische Zeitschrift*, 210 (1970): 583-619. For Baumgart's articles not cited in the subsequent notes see "Ludendorff und das Auswärtige Amt zur Besetzung der Krim 1918," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, 14 (1966): 529-38; "Neue Quellen zur Beurteilung Ludendorffs," *Militärgeschichtliche Mitteilungen*, 1969, no. 2, pp. 161-77; and "Unternehmen 'Schlusstein,'" *Wehrwissenschaftliche Rundschau*, 19 (1969): 112-16, 172-76, 217-31, 285-91, 331-55, 411-41, 457-77.

6. Werner Basler, *Deutschlands Annexionspolitik in Polen und im Baltikum, 1914-1918* (Berlin, 1963); Autorenkollektiv, *Deutsch-sowjetische Beziehungen von den Verhandlungen in Brest-Litowsk bis zum Abschluss des Rapallovertrages* (Berlin, 1967), vol. 1; Willibald Gutsche, Fritz Klein, Helmut Kral, Joachim Petzold, "Neue Forschungen zur Geschichte Deutschlands im ersten Weltkrieg," *Jahrbuch für Geschichte*, vol. 1 (Berlin, 1967), pp. 282-306; and Joachim Petzold, *Deutschland im Ersten Weltkrieg* (Berlin, 1969), vol. 3.

7. For permission to use the diary of her father I would like to thank Mrs. M. White. All quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from it. Although they were taken sporadically, Riezler's notes are corroborated to a surprising degree by the official diplomatic correspondence in the German Foreign Office, cited as AA with the appropriate number, *Russland 61* (allgemeines), vols. 151-61, *Deutschland 131* (Beziehungen zu Russland), vols. 33-46, and *Deutschland 131 secreta*, vols. 18 ff. The *Nachlass* of Foreign Secretary Kühlmann has been destroyed, and the Hintze papers are disappointing. Professor K. D. Erdmann is currently preparing an edition of the diaries. See his essay, "Zur Beurteilung Bethmann Hollwegs," *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht*, 15 (1964): 525-40; and Fritz Stern's "Bethmann Hollweg and the War: The Limits of Responsibility," in L. Krieger and F. Stern, eds., *The Responsibility of Power* (Garden City, 1967), pp. 252-85.

tion on international affairs and penetrating observation of the machinations of power.⁸ Moreover, he enjoyed a reputation as a Russian specialist, because after Lenin's seizure of power, "a further miracle for our rescue," he had been sent to Stockholm on a special mission "to bring about direct negotiations on the front and to prevent a Socialist [peace] conference." "We will apparently be doomed even as victors," Riezler feared, and he struggled in his dispatches and reports "against the complete misunderstanding of the Bolsheviks, especially by the Left, who failed to comprehend that only force could bring the Soviets to the negotiating table, since they want revolution, not understanding." But supported by heavy industry, the militarism of the majority of Wilhelmian elites, and William II's psychological abdication, "the barely concealed military dictatorship" of the III OHL (Supreme Command) made any rational power policy impossible. "Led by the nose by Baltic barons, polonophobes, and Turk-baiters, the Supreme Command . . . does the stupidest possible thing and makes the ad hoc Baltic national council, a creature of German bayonets, proclaim the annexation of Estonia and Livonia and raises the imperial standard in a region which Russia can least do without." Because the imperialist government would never accept a socialist peace of reconciliation while the OHL clamored for direct domination, Riezler supported the imposed Eastern settlement and subscribed to the Wilhelmstrasse's diplomatic exploitation of Bolshevik weakness as the only practicable course. But because the Supreme Command embraced the annexationism of the Right, and the Foreign Office, besieged by the war-weary Left, possessed only a narrow political base among the moderate *Besitz-* and *Bildungsbürgertum*, "a foreign policy is scarcely possible any longer."⁹

The German diplomats' initial impressions of revolutionary Russia hardly bolstered their confidence in the viability of the Soviet regime: "The devil could not have thrown the whole capitalist world into greater confusion and consternation than the Bolsheviks." Everywhere Riezler found signs of the decay of tsarist society, but he had difficulty seeing the new order rising in

8. Riezler's theoretical writings are *Die Erforderlichkeit des Unmöglichen: Prolegomena zu einer Theorie der Politik und zu anderen Theorien* (Munich, 1913), and under the pseudonym J. J. Ruedorffer, *Grundzüge der Weltpolitik der Gegenwart* (Stuttgart, 1914). For an analysis of their ideas see Andreas Hillgruber, "Riezler's Theorie des kalkulierten Risikos und Bethmann Hollweg's politische Konzeption in der Julikrise 1914," *Historische Zeitschrift*, 202 (1966): 333–51, and my own article, "The Illusion of Limited War: Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg's Calculated Risk, July 1914," *Central European History*, 2 (1969): 48–76.

9. Riezler diary, Stockholm, Jan. 14, 24, Feb. 11; "On the way to Berlin," Jan. 29; Berlin, Apr. 15, 1918. See his comment on the Brest talks: "Kühlmann faces immense difficulties with a public opinion incapable of negotiating behind him, confronted with the half-mad Bolsheviks and flanked by General von Hoffmann on one side and Czernin on the other side." For his Stockholm mission see also Z. A. B. Zeman, *Germany and the Revolution in Russia, 1915–1918* (London, 1958), pp. 81, 89, 108, and *passim*.

its place: "The economic plight is becoming more and more desperate. It is incredible how the country staggers on because the masses are used to suffering and chaos." But he noted with some satisfaction that "the conspiracy of the Entente with the Petersburg marine divisions, the Right S.R.'s, and the Mensheviks, as well as Trotsky's insubordination, were parried well. Through numerous executions and increased silent terror the Bolsheviks have survived the critical moment once more here [in Moscow] and in St. Petersburg." But from another side came a more dangerous threat to Soviet rule: "In the provinces the situation is grave—between Pensa and Tomsk the entire railroad is in the hands of the Czechoslovaks, whom the Entente claims to protect, which we cannot permit." Lenin and his followers looked more and more "like a football tossed back and forth between the two opposing camps [of the Central Powers and the Entente] accompanied by threatening notes." Beyond Allied intervention was rampant hunger, and "the Bolshevik attempt to deafen the famine by agitation and violent measures against the kulaks" was undercutting the social basis of their revolutionary alliance with the Left S.R.'s. Moreover, Germany contributed to the chaos with "its burning and looting after the conclusion of peace,"¹⁰ that is, the continuation of the military advance toward Briansk, which focused Left S.R. wrath on the German diplomats in Moscow. "The dictatorship of the proletariat has developed into a dictatorship of Mirbach," thundered Kamkov at the Fifth All-Russian Congress of Soviets. "Down with Mirbach! [Count Mirbach-Harff, the German ambassador in Moscow] Away with the German butchers! Away with the hangman's noose of Brest!"¹¹

Because of the Bolsheviks' weakness in the face of growing civil war and

10. Riezler diary, Moscow, Apr. 24, May 11, June 8, 1918. "Strange people," he said. "Idealism and corruption abound around us." One of the officers attached to the legation, Major K. Bothmer, considered Riezler "a man with gifts considerably above the average and with a comprehensive *Bildung*," and concluded: "The political work seems to lie almost exclusively in the hands of Dr. Riezler, who is reputed to have special insight into Eastern politics." See *Mit Graf Mirbach in Moskau* (Tübingen, 1922), pp. 21-22. For the military reaction to the Bolsheviks see Winfried Baumgart, "Die militärpolitischen Berichte des Freiherrn von Keyserlingk aus Petersburg, Januar-Februar 1918," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 15 (1967): 87-104.

11. Eyewitness accounts of the Fifth All-Russian Congress of Soviets are Robert Bruce Lockhart, *Memoirs of a British Agent* (London, 1932), pp. 291 ff.; M. Philips Price, *Die russische Revolution: Erinnerungen aus den Jahren 1917-1919* (Hamburg, 1921), pp. 406 ff.; and Jacques Sadoul, *Notes sur la révolution bolchévique* (Paris, 1919), pp. 393 ff. On August 28 Riezler recalled in his diary: "The sessions in the Bolshoi Theater: the meeting with Kamkov on stage and his embarrassment. In the grand duke's box: Spiridonova speaking for half an hour: 'Bombs shall fly! Dried up woman.'" For the background to Left S.R. discontent see O. H. Radkey, *The Sickle Under the Hammer: The Russian Socialist Revolution in the Early Months of Soviet Rule* (New York, 1963); K. V. Gusev, *Krakh partii levykh eserov* (Moscow, 1963); and I. N. Steinberg, *In the Workshop of the Revolution* (New York, 1953).

Allied intervention, the diplomatic basis of their rule—German recognition and cooperation, however half-hearted—was eroding rapidly. “We have reached a crossroads,” Riezler reported to Berlin. “Time is running against us; the Bolsheviks are washed up and we have to invent something new.” At first sincerely convinced that their interests seemed to lie in the continuation of the Soviet regime, the German diplomats in the Russian capital were having second thoughts: “Our continued advance in the South, utterly contrary to international law and undertaken only with the most threadbare of reasons, has undermined our position here, frightened and weakened the Bolsheviks considerably, and given the Entente and the other socialist parties an opportunity for a grand coup which will hopefully be foiled once more.”¹² Aggravated by German military interference, Soviet weakness posed the “fundamental question”: “Shall we let the Bolsheviks crumble into a pro-Entente chaos and risk the probably limited re-establishment of order with or against us—or shall we ourselves undertake the restoration of Russia which we have just destroyed and in return for the inevitable reunification of the Ukraine with Great Russia obtain an alliance and economic hegemony?” In early July the ambassador and the political staff in Moscow abandoned their previous support for the Soviets and “pressed for a more concrete understanding with the bourgeois [groups], since the time was ripe to abandon the Bolsheviks in order to reach an agreement with the Russia of the future.”¹³ But because their successors “would not recognize the treaty of Brest-Litovsk,” subvert German hegemony, and reopen the war in the East, Foreign Secretary Kühlmann succeeded in forcing through an imperial order “to support the Bolsheviks and only to be in touch with the others.” In a classic phrase he stated the reason: “Bolshevik rule means the weakness of Russia, and we still have a great interest in that.”¹⁴ Nevertheless the switch of the Moscow

12. Riezler to Bergen (private letter), June 24, 1918, AA Dld 131, vol. 42. See also Mirbach's recommendations in Winfried Baumgart, “Die Mission des Grafen Mirbach in Moskau, April-Juni 1918,” *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 16 (1968): 66-96, and his unpublished telegrams of June 3, 5, 13, 14, and 25, in Dld 131, vols. 40 ff., Dld 131 secr., vol. 18, and Rld 61, vols. 151 ff. Riezler diary, Apr. 24, May 11, June 8, and Aug. 17, 1918: “If this continues we abandon the political terrain to the Entente and give up future possibilities.” For the Ukrainian question see AA Rld 61, vols. 149 ff.; H. Beyer, “Die Mittelmächte und die Ukraine 1918,” *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, supp. no. 2 (Munich, 1956); and Winfried Baumgart, “General Groener und die deutsche Besatzungspolitik in der Ukraine 1918,” *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht*, 21 (1970): 325-40.

13. Mirbach to Foreign Office, June 25, 1918, AA Dld 131 secr., vol. 18, and Riezler diary, June 8 and Aug. 17, 1918. For the military observers' advocacy of intervention see Bothmer, *Mit Mirbach*, pp. 65 ff.; W. W. Schubert, *Der Zweite Weltkrieg hat 1918 begonnen* (Munich, 1957); Eduard Stadler, *Als politischer Soldat, 1914-1918* (Düsseldorf, 1936), pp. 129-30; and the reminiscences of the chief of the German press bureau, Alfons Paquet, *Im kommunistischen Russland* (Jena, 1919), pp. 16 ff.

14. Kühlmann's rationale is in his decisive telegram to Lersner favoring cooperation,

embassy to the side of the interventionists, led by the military but supported by the entire German Right, boded ill for the future of Soviet rule, as Riezler perceptively observed: "This [duplicity] will not work for long, because one cannot negotiate with the desperate middle class without making definite commitments."¹⁵

The deterioration of relations between Moscow and Berlin turned into an open crisis with the murder of Count Mirbach. Despite numerous warnings of assassination attempts and precautionary discussions between embassy personnel and the Cheka, the plot unfolded like a *Kriminalroman*. At exactly 2:45 on the sultry afternoon of July 6, 1918, a handsome bearded revolutionary, accompanied by his pale, red-headed companion, rang at the door of the German embassy and demanded to see the minister "in a purely personal matter." Since Bliumkin, a high official of the secret police, and Andreev, a member of the Revolutionary Tribunal, presented credentials signed by Cheka chief Dzerzhinsky himself, Riezler led the revolutionaries into the Red Salon, an intimate drawing room, where he and the translator Müller faced Bliumkin across a massive table while Andreev remained at a respectful distance. Scoffing at Riezler's insistence that as the ranking member of the political staff he was empowered to negotiate for Mirbach, Bliumkin was finally persuaded to accept the ambassador's decision in writing. But a strange fate compelled Count Mirbach "not to give me the written authorization," wrote Riezler in his diary, but to confront the visitors himself, "completely unsuspecting, because of the plausibility of the pretext."¹⁶

Dec. 3, 1917, AA Dld 131 secr., vol. 17, reiterated to Lersner as late as July 3, 1918, AA Dld 131, vol. 42. See also his *Erinnerungen* (Heidelberg, 1948), pp. 546 ff. For the struggle between the Supreme Command and the Chancellery over intervention see Ludendorff's letter of June 9 and Hertling's answer on June 22, 1918, AA Dld 131, vol. 40, and K. A. Hertling, *Ein Jahr in der Reichskanzlei* (Freiburg, 1919) versus Erich Ludendorff, *Meine Kriegserinnerungen, 1914–1918* (Berlin, 1919), pp. 526 ff.

15. Riezler diary, June 8, Aug. 17, 1918: "If politics ever was navigating on uncharted seas, this is now the case. Since Skoropadsky, the course begun with Brest has been deflected irrevocably. There remains only sooner or later the restoration of Russia or dancing from moment to moment while one can break one's neck at any time." See also Günter Rosenfeld, *Sowjetrusland und Deutschland, 1917–1922* (Berlin, 1960), pp. 93 ff., and Baumgart, *Deutsche Ostpolitik*, pp. 208 ff.

16. On August 28, 1918, Riezler committed the circumstances of the assassination to his diary from memory. Generally agreeing with his own deposition of July 7 and the account of Lieutenant Müller of July 7 on "the course of the assassination of July 6, 1918, in the German embassy," his notes contain a cryptic reference on "my conversations before the murder with Karakhan and Dzerzhinsky about the warnings" as well as the names "Weinberg, Hintzsch" of the agents involved. See also Kühlmann to William II, July 6, 1918, and the latter's marginalia on an article of the *Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* of the following day: "Mirbach's death must be exploited thoroughly against the Entente at home and abroad by our propaganda. . . . *You have done it . . . !* From this the neutrals and our people must learn." The correspondence surrounding the crime is in AA Rld 31k, Ermordung des Grafen Mirbach.

Seated at the head of the table, Count Mirbach followed the conversation with distinct lack of interest. On the basis of Cheka documents, Bliumkin presented the case of the ambassador's distant Hungarian relative Count Robert Mirbach, who had been arrested several weeks earlier in connection with the mysterious suicide of a Swedish actress. Since the ambassador showed only mild interest in the confused presentation, Riezler suggested a written consultation with Assistant Foreign Secretary Karakhan, but Andreev interrupted ominously: "This is a matter of life and death for Count Mirbach." Joining in, "I'll soon show you," Bliumkin now sprang to his feet and pulled a Browning automatic from his attaché case. He fired three shots, but incredibly these point-blank bullets missed their mark. "Petrified with surprise," Riezler and Müller dove under the table, where—unarmed—they were defenseless, for "the assassins had positioned themselves shrewdly." Agonized because he could not help the ambassador, Riezler watched "Mirbach grimace and run for his life, as yet unhurt." Dashing past Andreev for the vestibule, the ambassador had already crossed two-thirds of the ballroom when a seventh shot struck his head from behind, the bullet "coming out just above his nose, killing him instantly." Before the frightened diplomats could clamber to their feet, a terrific explosion, ripping a hole in the parquet, burst the windows and brought down a hail of stucco and crystal. When the Germans reached the shattered panes, they could only watch in impotent anger as the terrorists sped away in their waiting Cheka limousine after leaping through the window into the garden and scaling the eight-foot fence. Shaken but unharmed, Riezler helped military attaché Schubert turn the villa into a small fortress, dispatched two officers in protest to the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs, and tried "to forget all these horrible things, which I could not think about for weeks."¹⁷

"The most dramatic political murder of modern times," in Robert Bruce Lockhart's words, was nevertheless overshadowed by the Left S.R. uprising against Lenin's rule. Enraged by the proscription of the kulaks by the Poor Peasant Committees, the "romantics of the revolution" attempted, according

17. Riezler diary, Aug. 28, 1918. Kühlmann to Grünau, July 6, 1918, AA DId 131, vol. 42. Bothmer, *Mit Mirbach*, pp. 70 ff.; Paquet, *Im kommunistischen Russland*, pp. 24ff.; Gustav Hilger and A. G. Meyer, *The Incompatible Allies* (New York, 1953), pp. 1 ff.; Wipert von Blücher, *Deutschlands Weg nach Rapallo* (Wiesbaden, 1951), pp. 16 ff.; and K. F. Nowak, ed., *Die Aufzeichnungen des Generalmajors Max von Hoffmann* (Berlin, 1929), 2:200 ff., with the typical diary entry: "According to my opinion the Entente together with the Kadets stand behind the crime [the shooting of Count Mirbach]. They hope to cause a resumption of the hostilities between Germany and Russia. I consider it impossible that the Bolsheviks are somehow involved." For the reaction of the Western diplomats see Maurice Verstraete, *Mes cahiers russes* (Paris, 1920), pp. 339 ff.; Louis de Robien, *Journal d'un diplomate en Russie, 1917-1918* (Paris, 1921), pp. 304-5; and Price, *Die russische Revolution*, pp. 410-11.

to a German General Staff report, "to wrest power from the Bolsheviks and to provoke the rupture of the treaty of Brest, thereby renewing the war with Germany through the murder of the ambassador and other terrorist measures." Although only contradictory rumors reached the German embassy about the street fighting in Moscow, Riezler confidently telegraphed the Wilhelmstrasse: "Through immediate ruthless action and good organization, the Bolsheviks will maintain the upper hand and, unless their own troops fail, be once again successful."¹⁸ Mobilizing their entire party strength and proclaiming a state of siege, the Bolsheviks immediately counterattacked the Left S.R.'s in the central telegraph office, the main power plant, and the Pokrovsky barracks, where an anarchist marine brigade under Popov had captured the hated Cheka chief Dzerzhinsky. Since bourgeois and monarchist counterrevolutionaries failed to join the revolt, and the countryside did not erupt in flames, the isolated S.R. putschists were quickly defeated and their leadership taken hostage in the Bolshoi Theater. According to the latest German news, order had been restored in Moscow: "Through resolute action and undeniable skill the Bolsheviks have impressed everyone and gained a temporary respite." Fearing that a victory of the Left S.R.'s would not "lead to a government but to complete anarchy and pogroms" against the Germans, Riezler hoped for the survival of the Bolshevik regime and recommended the death penalty for the putschists to William II, who agreed emotionally. When the smoke cleared, the miscarried S.R. coup had reaffirmed Lenin's power, since after the party had been expelled from the Soviets he could rule alone. *Pravda* saw greater danger from abroad: "Through the responsibility of the Left S.R. hoodlums who fell in step with Savinkov and company, Russia finds herself—a hair's breadth from war."¹⁹

Since German punitive intervention threatened unless the Bolsheviks

18. Lockhart, *British Agent*, pp. 290 ff. The following account is taken from a barrage of Riezler telegrams to the Foreign Office, July 7 ff., AA Rld 31k. See also the daily General Staff reports on the "domestic situation of Russia," July 7 ff., in AA Rld 61, vol. 158. See also Gusev's chapter "Miatezh levykh eserov," in *Krakh*, pp. 191–216; F. Gladkov, "Petushinyi zagovor," *Molodoi Kommunist*, December 1967, pp. 48–53; L. Spirin, "Razgrom miatezha levykh eserov v Moskve 6–7 iulia 1918 goda," *Voenno-istoricheskii zhurnal*, 1968, no. 8, pp. 38–47. Of the older literature see V. D. Bonch-Bruевич, *Ubistvo germanskogo posla Mirbakha i vosstanie levykh eserov* (Moscow, 1927); William Hard, *Raymond Robins' Own Story* (New York and London, 1920), pp. 180 ff.; and John Bunyan, ed., *Intervention, Civil War and Communism in Russia, April-December 1918* (Baltimore, 1936), pp. 197 ff.

19. A spate of Bussche telegrams to Grünau July 8 ff., forwarding Riezler's latest news to the emperor, AA Rld 31k. Cf. Sadoul, *Notes sur la révolution*, pp. 402 ff.; Price, *Die russische Revolution*, pp. 413 ff.; and E. A. Ross, *The Russian Soviet Republic* (New York, 1923), pp. 70 ff. See also "Likvidatsiia levoeserovskogo miatezha v Moskve v 1918 g.," in *Krasnyi arkhiv*, 1940, no. 4, pp. 101 ff., and I. Vatsetis, "Vystuplenie levykh eserov v Moskve," in *Etapy bol'shogo puti* (Moscow, 1963).

could prove their innocence of the crime, the Soviets had to "influence the tenor of the German report to Berlin at any cost." Beginning with the ubiquitous Radek, a procession of Soviet dignitaries including Lenin himself expressed condolences to the German chargé d'affaires. Secretary of Narkomindel Grigorii Chicherin moreover gave the assurance that his government "would do everything to avenge and punish the crime, since it was directed not so much against Germany as against the Bolsheviks." The official version that was spread by Minister of Trade Bronsky and by press releases, that the assassination was perpetrated by the Left S.R.'s, was fortuitously confirmed by "a report of the Left Socialist Revolutionaries in a bulletin edited by them, that Count Mirbach was murdered by their terrorist section."²⁰ Nevertheless, many of the details of the murder remained obscure. The complicity of the secret police, the lukewarm persecution of the murderers, and the wholesale execution of several dozen counterrevolutionaries "to placate the Germans" have led George Katkov to argue according to the principle *cui bono* that Lenin himself in a Machiavellian masterstroke intended "to have the treacherous German Minister put out of the way for ever and to make this an opportunity for the no less final liquidation of the Left S.R.'s as an independent political factor in Soviet Russia."²¹ But instead of seizing upon this ready-made pretext for intervention, the Kaiser, the Foreign Office, the Supreme Command, the press, and the German public unquestioningly

20. Bussche to Grünau, July 6; Bussche to Lersner, July 7; Joffe to Kühlmann, July 6, AA Bonn, Dld 131, vol. 42, and *Dokumenty vnesheinei politiki SSSR* (Moscow, 1959), 1:380 ff. See also *Is istorii VChK, 1914-1917* (Moscow, 1958), pp. 146 ff.; V. I. Lenin, *Sochineniia*, 35 vols., 4th ed. (Moscow, 1941-50), 27:492 ff., and G. V. Chicherin, "Vneshniaia politika Sovetskoi Rossii za dva goda," in *Vospominaniia o Lenine* (Moscow, 1957), 2:166 ff. For the lack of clarity compare Bussche (Riezler) to Grünau, July 10, 1918: "Because of the close connection between the Left S.R.'s and the Bolsheviks in government, one cannot suppress the suspicion that several Bolsheviks also helped the escape" of the assassins. Hence Riezler asked for "the immediate sending of an experienced detective fluent in Russian," AA Rld 31k and Dld 131, vol. 42.

21. George Katkov, "The Assassination of Count Mirbach," *Soviet Affairs*, 3 (1962): 53-93 (St. Antony's Papers, no. 12), quotation on p. 91. Based on Trotsky's *Diary in Exile, 1935* (Cambridge, Mass., 1958), Ivanov-Razumnik's *Tiur'my i ssylki* (New York, 1953), and G. A. Salomon's *Sredi krasnykh vozhdiei* (Paris, 1930), Katkov argues: "Mirbach's revealed or suspected duplicity in his dealings with the Soviet rulers must have made the decision to eliminate him a much easier one than the passing of the death sentence on the children and servants of the Imperial family" (pp. 91-92). Picked up by Stefan T. Possony, *Lenin: The Compulsive Revolutionary* (Chicago, 1964), pp. 282 ff., Robert Payne, *The Life and Death of Lenin* (New York, 1964), pp. 463-64, and in muted form by Adam B. Ulam, *The Bolsheviks* (New York, 1965), pp. 423 ff., this conspiratorial thesis suffers from one major contradiction. How could Lenin be sure that the German interventionist party would not be strengthened by the crime? Baumgart, *Deutsche Ostpolitik*, pp. 224 ff., hedges his bet. However fascinating it may be to speculate on who originated the crime, it is evident that the German government did not regard Lenin as the culprit.

accepted the Soviet propaganda fiction that the assassination was an Entente attempt "to kill two birds with one stone: get rid of the troublesome German ambassador and overthrow the Bolsheviks through the internal and external repercussions of the crime."²²

Because he preferred some form of pro-German counterrevolution to the Soviets and their pro-Entente enemies, Riezler now demanded the withdrawal of the embassy from Moscow and a temporary rupture of relations until full restitution had been made: "The putsches in Iaroslav and Vladimir . . . , the unreliability of the railroad workers in the East, the treason of Muraviev, the Soviet commander on the Czech front, his declaration of war and his attempt to lead his troops" toward Moscow all made it seem imperative to leave the sinking ship. He recalled, "All soldiers in the embassy were . . . greatly relieved when I told them I would ask for permission to withdraw." But the German chargé noted dejectedly in his diary that "Berlin showed no understanding of the situation." As one of his last acts as foreign secretary, Kühlmann advised William II not to break with Lenin: "If at all possible the resumption of regular warfare in the East must be avoided." Similarly counter to the expectations of Ludendorff, his successor Hintze, a former naval attaché in St. Petersburg, argued persuasively not to follow the ideological impulse toward intervention: "Anybody but the Bolsheviks would naturally suit us more; but they cannot provide what we need most: the implementation of the peace of Brest and the continued military paralysis of Russia." Instead of a clear choice between counterrevolution and sincere collaboration, the Wilhelmstrasse continued to support Lenin while inquiring "which of the opposition groups would be preferable." Unable to "obtain [clear] instructions about the desired policy," Riezler suspected that through the promise of economic concessions, "Joffe has completely bamboozled" the Foreign Office. More realistic about the limits of German strength and confident that Bolshevik rule would guarantee indirect hegemony in Central and Eastern Europe, the Wilhelmstrasse clung to its policy of cooperation, because it achieved most annexationist objectives without the blatant use of military means.²³

22. Riezler diary, Aug. 28, 1918. Bussche to Riezler, July 11, AA DId 131, vol. 42: "If the S.R.'s seize power in Moscow and do not come to terms with us, I consider the following useful: First, a military advance from Finland against Murmansk and Archangel; second, the occupation of Petersburg and a move toward Vologda," that is, a pro-Bolshevik military intervention against the Entente forces and embassies. "I do not yet consider the time ripe for the bourgeois parties. They are officers without soldiers, since the masses are not tired enough of the disorder." See also Paquet, *Im kommunistischen Russland*, pp. 31–32, and the articles in the *Vossische Zeitung* and *Tägliche Rundschau*, July 7; *Der Tag*, July 8; *Neue Freie Presse*, July 10; *Hamburger Nachrichten*, July 12; and *Frankfurter Zeitung*, July 16—all of which downplayed the crime and attributed it to the Entente.

23. Riezler diary, Aug. 28, 1918. Kühlmann to Grünau, July 6, 1918; Lersner to

"If we cannot break off relations temporarily for the sake of our honor," Riezler cabled Hintze in mid-July, "we might consider letting the Bolsheviks choose between accepting a German protection force for the embassy or withdrawing our mission, until concrete guarantees for its security can be obtained." Repeating Trotsky's bon mot, "the Soviets are dead, their corpse is alive only because the gravediggers cannot agree on its burial," Riezler strongly urged "taking the leadership of the counterrevolution into our own hands, and installing a pro-German government in Moscow and Petersburg." Seizing upon an idea "considered indispensable for our security by the military attachés," he proposed assigning one battle-proven battalion as embassy guard. German troops in Moscow would create a strong position "for us in order to survive the present chaos and hasten the appointment of a friendly government by the mere presence of an armed force." He reported that Chicherin interpreted this plot as a slight to their sovereignty—a kind of Trojan horse—and was incensed at such blackmail. Hence the Soviet diplomat declared himself "unable to grant our request, even at the risk of breaking off the talks and resuming the war." To the chagrin of the Moscow legation the Wilhelmstrasse recoiled from a rupture, and Lenin astutely encouraged their passivity by whetting the capitalists' appetite with the promise of increased Soviet-German trade. When Narkomindel finally agreed to half of the demanded force and to the withdrawal of the Entente military mission from Moscow, Riezler considered it "a tolerable success, wrested alike from the Bolsheviks and our Foreign Office."²⁴

As a sign of continued German good will despite the Mirbach murder, former vice-chancellor Helfferich was appointed in late July as ambassador to Moscow. After stating, "our Eastern policy is characterized by a singular lack of unity, direction, and success," the headstrong and talented one-time banker had offered his services, "hoping to achieve something useful for our fatherland during this, the climax of our struggle for existence." Because of numerous warnings of further assassinations, Riezler "went to Kurzevo with Radek, stopped the train, drove up in a car," and safely brought the new ambassador to the Berg palace. "Apparently Helfferich has been sent here to change my reporting, which Berlin dislikes," the chargé surmised. But Riezler "explained the situation" so convincingly that the new ambassador

Hertling, July 10, 1918; AA Rld 31k; Lersner to Foreign Office, Bussche to Lersner, July 11, 1918, AA Dld 131, vol. 42; and Hintze to Lersner, July 21, 1918, AA Dld 131, vol. 43. The Soviets were not intimidated by the strong language of the German diplomats in Moscow, because they had intercepted an uncoded telegram from the Prussian Ministry of War to the military attaché saying that relations would not be broken.

24. Riezler to Foreign Office, July 10, 1918; Bussche to Lersner, July 11, 1918; Lersner to Foreign Office, July 14, 1918; Bussche to Lersner and Riezler, July 15, 1918; Riezler to Bussche, July 15, 1918, AA Rld 31k and Dld 131, vols. 43 ff. Riezler's most important report is his lengthy letter to the Foreign Office of July 19, 1918, AA Dld 131, vol. 44: "Should we resolve to run the risk of taking the leadership of the counter-

“soon understood that I was right and sent dispatches with the same advice, distinguished by his own precision, sharpness, and his belief in his influence with the Supreme Command and His Majesty.” So weak was the Bolshevik hold on power in late July 1918 that the new envoy was advised by his Soviet guards not to leave the embassy to present his credentials in the Kremlin. Foreign Secretary Chicherin visited him instead. This “so-called house-arrest,” which was “hardly a dignified condition for the representative of the German empire,” did little to reinforce Helfferich’s faith in collaboration with the Soviets. Living in the cellar of the Berg palace as in a beleaguered fortress, cordoned off by unreliable troops, the new ambassador spoke out clearly: “The central question is: can we keep from being dragged into the collapse of the Bolsheviks and prevent the creation of a new government in pronounced opposition to us?”²⁵ But Foreign Secretary Hintze received more optimistic reports from other sources, such as the pro-Bolshevik German agent Karl Moor, who argued that Soviet rule was still firm.²⁶

Helfferich’s eloquent pleas for a revision of German Eastern policy fell on deaf ears. “Berlin does not react, but repeats the old instructions,” Riezler complained. “Apparently Kriege with his supplementary treaty [negotiations to supplement the Brest-Litovsk agreement] dominates all decisions.” The ideological and practical contradictions in the Kaiser’s strange collaboration with Lenin remained unresolved. Since the puppet regimes in the Ukraine, the Baltic States, and Georgia demonstrated German “support for the All-

revolution into our hands, it *may* be possible to overthrow the entire counterrevolutionary scheme of the Entente by establishing a pro-German government in Moscow and Petersburg, which favors peace and order and comes to an agreement with the Siberian government over the heads of the Czechs.” See also the Riezler diary, Aug. 28, 1918. For the pressure of the military attachés see Lersner to Foreign Office, July 13, 1918, AA DId 131, vol. 43, on which Ludendorff endorsed cooperation with the monarchists, “the only possible party for us.” See also the memorandum of the embassy’s economic specialist, Dr. List, July 11, 1918, arguing “in favor of rejecting Bolshevik ideas in order to open the field for the capitalists.” For the eventual compromise see Foreign Office to Lersner, July 20, and Hintze to Lersner, July 25, 1918, AA RId 31k, and *Dokumenty vneshnei politiki SSSR*, vol. 1.

25. Hertling to Foreign Office, July 14, 1918, authorizing Helfferich’s appointment, AA RId 31k. Riezler diary, Sept. 12, 1918. For Helfferich’s views see his telegrams beginning with July 30, the exchange with Hintze on August 1 and 2, especially the cable of August 2, transmitting Chicherin’s request for armed assistance against the Entente landing in Murmansk: “This shows glaringly in what an extreme predicament the Bolsheviks find themselves.” See also Karl Helfferich, *Der Weltkrieg* (Karlsruhe, 1925), pp. 639 ff.; Bothmer, *Mit Mirbach*, pp. 111 ff.; Paquet, *Im kommunistischen Russland*, pp. 79 ff.; Lockhart, *British Agent*, pp. 306 ff.; Verstraete, *Cahiers russes*, pp. 339 ff.; Kurt von Raumer, “Zwischen Brest-Litowsk und Compiègne: Die deutsche Ostpolitik vom Sommer 1918,” *Baltische Lande*, 4 (1939): 1–13; J. G. Williamson, *Karl Helfferich, 1872–1924* (Princeton, 1971), pp. 272 ff.

26. H. Schurer, “Karl Moor: German Agent and Friend of Lenin,” *Journal of Contemporary History*, 5 (1970): 131–52.

Russian counterrevolution," diplomatic cooperation and peaceful trade were destined to be sterile. "The time has come to make a clear choice," Helfferich warned the foreign secretary: "Even if your Excellency wants to bear the responsibility for the consequences of our clinging to the Bolsheviks and pushing emerging Russia into the arms of the Entente, I cannot defend such a course to my conscience." Despite the enthusiastic approval of the emperor, these arguments found no favor with Hintze and the Foreign Office. Compared with the "nebulous promises of the White factions," Hintze said, "international treaties represent an asset whose value cannot be overestimated, if they are backed by considerable force." Because of the Allied breakthrough, German armies in the West could not be depleted, and any non-Bolshevik government "over the short or long [term] will demand the *status quo ante*." When Helfferich inquired about the possible withdrawal of the embassy, Hintze responded: "Abandoning the capital would be tantamount to breaking off relations. Hence we must stay. Only if our lives are in danger should we leave." The German diplomats were exasperated by such contradictory instructions, and Helfferich replied that he would follow his own judgment. To compound the confusion the Wilhelmstrasse finally authorized that feelers be made to the counterrevolutionary groups and that secret negotiations be entered into with the elite guards of the Revolution, the Latvian regiments, promising them amnesty, because they were the "key to the Russian capital."²⁷

Since the new ambassador found himself in the same opposition to the Foreign Office as his unfortunate predecessor Mirbach, "nine days after his arrival, Helfferich was ordered to return to Berlin to report." Contrary to legend, the former vice-chancellor did not leave Moscow voluntarily, as the Soviet ambassador in Berlin, Adolf Joffe, gleefully claimed, but was recalled by Hintze because he was pursuing an anti-Bolshevik policy. His departure revealed that because the dispute over cooperation and intervention had immobilized its diplomatic representatives in the Russian capital, German *Ostpolitik* had reached a dead end. Before returning to Berlin, Helfferich had empowered Riezler "to seek a secure place for the mission in case of duress or danger to our lives," and had implemented his own instruction by moving the embassy to St. Petersburg. Surprisingly Hintze approved, glad to have the

27. Riezler diary, Sept. 12, 1918. Schubert to War Ministry, Aug. 1, 1918, AA Dld 131, vol. 44a: "The new ambassador has gained the conviction that the embassy in Moscow cannot do any more practical work and that a visible distancing from the Bolsheviks has become indispensable and unpostponable." See also William II's marginalia on Hintze's telegram to Grünau, Aug. 4, 1918, AA Dld 131, vol. 44a: "Helfferich's report agrees with my opinion. It is dangerous to tie our fate further to the dying Bolsheviks!" For Helfferich's arguments see also G. A. von Müller, *Regierte der Kaiser?* (Göttingen, 1959), pp. 409–10. Hintze's counterarguments are summarized in his telegram to Helfferich of Aug. 4, and to Hertling, Aug. 5, 1918, AA Dld 131, vols. 44 ff., Rld 31k and Rld 61, vol. 160.

troublesome Cassandras removed from Moscow, where their plotting could endanger Soviet-German relations. When he was negotiating for the use of the Stolypin palace in St. Petersburg, Riezler was ordered to move to Pskov behind the German lines under the pretext that St. Petersburg was unsafe. Determined to prevent an independent Russian policy of his diplomats on the spot, Hintze had withdrawn the German embassy from Soviet territory, preferring to deal through Joffe in Berlin. "Most cordially" Riezler conveyed the news to the dismayed Zinoviev and Uritsky, and "after a difficult moment of distrust," hinted "that the withdrawal of the mission was inspired" by the idea "of cooperating against British intervention at Murmansk and the desire to conceal German support."²⁸

In the ensuing confrontation in Berlin, Hintze scored a surprisingly easy victory over Helfferich's advocacy of a rupture with the Bolsheviks. "What do we actually want in the East?" the foreign secretary asked rhetorically. "The military paralysis of Russia: *That* aim the Bolsheviks accomplish better and more thoroughly than any other Russian party, without our having to sacrifice one man and one mark. We cannot demand that they or any other Russians love us for our repression and exploitation. Let us be content with the impotence of Russia!" Since in August 1918 the German Empire was engaged in a death struggle on the Western front and could spare no troops for intervention, the expediency of such a policy could not be denied even by the Red-baiter Ludendorff. Helfferich's warning fell on deaf ears when he reported that the imminent collapse of the Soviet regime confronted them "with a choice of either supporting Bolshevik rule through active military intervention or abandoning them in time and courting those factions which will replace them." Revealing the cynicism of the Wilhelmstrasse's policy Foreign Secretary Hintze countered with a third alternative: "to work with the Bolsheviks or to use them, as long as they are in the saddle, to our own best advantage."²⁹

28. Riezler diary, Sept. 12, 1918. Hintze to Helfferich, Aug. 5, 1918; Hintze to Riezler, Aug. 6, 1918; Riezler to Foreign Office, Aug. 9, 1918, AA DId 131, vols. 45-46; Riezler to Foreign Office, Aug. 18, 1918, AA RId 61, vol. 160. See also Hintze to Ludendorff, Aug. 9, 1918, AA DId 131, vol. 45: "Even a genius, taken from his surroundings and placed in Moscow, would be unable to master the completely strange conditions in the necessary seclusion of his house not to such a degree as to be able to overthrow the basic pillars of the policy of a great empire with his reports." But on the "black day of the German army" the most telling argument was, "We lack the bayonets in order to restore the monarchy." See Kurt von Raumer, "Das Ende von Helfferichs Moskauer Mission 1918," *Gesamtdeutsche Vergangenheit: Festgabe für Heinrich Ritter von Srbik* (Munich, 1938), pp. 392-99.

29. Hintze to Lersner, Aug. 6, 1918; Helfferich memorandum to Hertling, Aug. 19, AA DId 131, vol. 46 (Baumgart, *Deutsche Ostpolitik*, pp. 392 ff.). More revealing yet are Hintze's draft answer (n.d., but in the last days of August) and a Foreign Office countermemorandum, refuting Helfferich's arguments against the supplementary treaties of

In an atmosphere charged with false amiability, the supplementary treaties to Brest-Litovsk were signed on August 27 in Berlin, stipulating the Russian payment of six billion marks in compensation for expropriations, the cession of Estonia and Livonia, the recognition of Georgian independence and the promise of 25 percent of Baku oil in return for German withdrawal from Belorussia, and the assurance of no further territorial occupation or support of counterrevolutionary schemes. In a startling secret appendix the Germans offered their own and Finnish troops to help evict the Allied intervention forces from northern Russia and from Baku.³⁰ Although the Soviet government considered the renewed extortion a minor victory because it committed Germany to disavowing intervention, the unconstitutional policy of the Foreign Office in ratifying the treaty without the consent of the Reichstag provoked a parliamentary storm. Socialist leader Friedrich Ebert called the treaty "a misfortune which it always will remain," since it strengthened Bolshevik rule, and in fact achieved the Pan-German demands in the Baltic and discredited Germany in the eyes of the peace movement in the West. The rationale that the treaties were a "bridle on the military" was acidly exploded by Center Party deputy Matthias Erzberger, who pointed to the secret supplement which might serve as a legal invitation for a German intervention force. But since the Reichstag Left shied away from a cabinet crisis, the Wilhelmstrasse for one last time had its way.³¹

Aug. 30, 1918, AA DId 131, vol. 47: "[Since] after the Brest peace treaty we entered upon the path of peaceful severance of the Baltic provinces from Russia, it would now be mistaken to refuse an opportunity for the peaceful implementation of our previous policy." See also the final reports by Colonel Schubert of August 24 and of the journalist Paquet of August 16, arguing for the revision of German Eastern policy, AA DId 131, vol. 46. See in addition Schubert, *Der Zweite Weltkrieg*, pp. 21–22; Stadler, *Als politischer Soldat*, p. 128; Helfferich, *Weltkrieg*, pp. 665 ff.; Hertling, *Ein Jahr in der Reichskanzlei*, pp. 147–48; and Ludendorff, *Kriegserinnerungen*, pp. 532–33.

30. *Dokumenty vneshnei politiki SSSR*, 1:467; "Geheimzusätze zum Brest-Litovsker Vertrag," *Europäische Gespräche*, 4 (1926): 148–53; and *Deutsch-sowjetische Beziehungen*, 1:724 ff. See also Friedrich von Prittwitz, *Zwischen Petersburg und Washington* (Munich, 1952), pp. 92 ff.; Graf Harry Kessler, *Walther Rathenau: Sein Leben und sein Werk* (Berlin, 1929), p. 299; Blücher, *Deutschlands Weg*, pp. 19–20; Rudolf Nadolny, *Mein Beitrag* (Wiesbaden, 1955), pp. 58–59; and Lubov Krassin, *Leomid Krassin: His Life and Work* (London, 1929), pp. 83–84. See also Albert Norden, *Zwischen Berlin und Moskau: Zur Geschichte der deutsch-sowjetischen Beziehungen* (Berlin, 1954); Briunin, "Sovetsko-germanskie otnosheniia," pp. 199–242; Hans Gatzke, "Zu den deutsch-russischen Beziehungen im Sommer 1918," *Vierteljahrshäfte für Zeitgeschichte*, 3 (1955): 67–98; and most recently Winfried Baumgart, "Die geschäftliche Behandlung des Berliner Ergänzungsvertrages vom 27. August, 1918," *Historisches Jahrbuch*, 89 (1969): 116–52.

31. Erzberger to Hintze, Aug. 21, 1918, AA DId 131, vol. 46: "The signing of the new Russo-German treaty as supplement to the peace of Brest-Litovsk would be an extremely grave political mistake, since the treaty not only brings no advantages, but will contribute to the quick re-establishment of an Eastern front and the creation of a Russia

“Our Eastern policy, aimless and disjointed, is a pile of rubble and a hardly imaginable chaos,” Legationsrat Riezler pondered the futility of German *Ostpolitik* in 1918. “We have founded and supported the Ukraine as a war measure. That would have been possible if we had let the only real Ukrainians, the people of the Rada, govern despite their incompetence, limited the occupation, and let them do their nonsense. Instead, driven by hunger for grain, we meddled in everything, did not get along with the socialist lawyers, overthrew the Rada and proclaimed Skoropadsky, the adjutant of the tsar and a Kadet ministry, men who only call themselves Ukrainians and are struggling to learn the language.” As nefarious as the abuse of the nationalities question was the continued military advance and the occupation of half of Kursk Guberniia and Rostov on the Don. This made the Left S.R.’s, who were “controlling half of the Soviet government,” in Riezler’s words, “our arch-enemies,” and it undermined the position of the Bolsheviks “by cutting off valuable Crimean grain and indispensable Baku oil.” The alternative had been plain: “If we want to support the Bolsheviks and through them cure the Russians of their enmity against us, we must let them live and not take away one important [province] after another and not aggravate them and disorient them through a new ultimatum every week.” When their attempt to “tame the soldiers in the South and induce the OHL to leave the Bolsheviks alone” had failed, the diplomats on the spot, trying to establish a coherent policy in the confusion, “advised the central office not to cling to the Bolshevik corpse,” and while supporting them as long as possible, “prepare for overthrowing them ourselves.” But in the decisive stage of the negotiations with the bourgeois opposition groups, “Berlin failed and concluded the ill-fated [supplementary] treaty which cut off our retreat.” Shattered by the OHL’s crude *Drang nach Osten*, the Wilhelmstrasse’s finely spun design was, as its Left critics charged, never a policy directed toward lasting peace, but only the short-range exploitation of the revolutionary chaos in the East. Though more realistic and restrained than the Supreme Command, the Foreign Office still played the dangerous game of establishing indirect German hegemony and did not struggle for an international order, acceptable to all, based on equality and noninterference. A disciple of sophisticated *Machtpolitik*, Riezler was chastened by the failure of Bethmann Hollweg’s *Mitteleuropa*, and saw the

forever united against Germany.” Protocol of the Reichstag leaders’ conference with the vice-chancellor, Aug. 21, 1918, AA DId 131, vol. 47 (Baumgart, *Deutsche Ostpolitik* pp. 400 ff.). Protocols of the session of the intraparty committee, Sept. 12, 1918, reprinted in Erich Matthias and Rudolf Morsey, *Der Interfraktionelle Ausschuss, 1917/18*, 2 vols. (Düsseldorf, 1959), 2:494 ff. See also Susanne Miller, ed., *Das Kriegstagebuch des Reichstagsabgeordneten Eduard David 1914 bis 1918* (Düsseldorf, 1966), pp. 281–82; Klaus Epstein, *Matthias Erzberger und das Dilemma der deutschen Demokratie* (Berlin, 1962), pp. 248–49; and Count K. F. V. Westarp, *Konservative Politik im letzten Jahrzehnt des Kaiserreiches*, 2 vols. (Berlin, 1935), 2:583–84.

latter course as the one in Germany's best interest: "We can render Russia harmless through the Bolsheviks, but with the evil we thereby also destroy all the benefit which it might still bring us."³²

The failure of a German *Ostpolitik* fluctuating between rape and embrace ultimately stemmed from the structural deadlock of Wilhelmian society and politics. "The ignorance and arbitrariness of the OHL, the errors of the Foreign Office and its ill-fated Russian specialist, the lack of communication between the centers of power," which irritated Riezler continually, were more than accidental. Ludendorff's military quasi dictatorship, based upon the "accursed inheritance of our nation," had to bear much of the blame for the "sad condition of the Foreign Office" and the impossibility of any rational policy. "Indeed," Riezler said, "the chancellor [Count Hertling] is a non-entity, incapable of direction and too old." But the personal ineptness of those responsible and the cancerous struggle between diplomats and soldiers could go unchallenged only in a country deluded about the limits of its power, and deeply at war with itself over the issue of internal change. The rampant annexationism of Wilhelmian elites backed the Supreme Command in interfering continually in the more limited power-politics of the Wilhelmstrasse, since it lacked any strong social base. The Left Reichstag majority was "half held in check through the Progressives' regard for Payer and the Centrum's respect for Hertling," who were considerably further right than the majority of their party. "The Social Democratic leaders, clairvoyant and decent, [who] are only used to thinking of keeping their party in order and satisfied with the endorsement of their convention, fear being forced to act." While the political middle and moderate Left were compromised by participation in power but incapable of forcing through their own ideas (such as Prussian suffrage reform), the far Left, the bourgeois and socialist peace movement, and the Spartacist revolutionaries had no political influence at all. Hence domestic pressure for a moderate Eastern policy was ineffectual, and the voices calling for a lasting and constructive German peace went unheard. Returning from Moscow, Riezler saw "ominous parallels": "Such a fog lay over prerevolutionary Russia, such fools and intriguers played first fiddle there, too. The upper classes are equally rife with fatigue and fatalism and the masses are

32. Riezler diary, Obersdorf, Sept. 12 and 13, 1918: "What opportunity and what charlatanism. This wants to be a world-people [*Weltvolk*] and defeat England. What mockery!" Favoring support of the vital Russian anti-Bolshevik movements, Riezler opposed the dismemberment of Russia through sham self-determination while endorsing independence movements wherever they seemed genuine. See also John S. Reshetar, *The Ukrainian Revolution, 1917-1920* (Princeton, 1952), and Winfried Baumgart, "Das 'Kaspi-Unternehmen'—Grössenwahn Ludendorffs oder Routineplanung des deutschen Generalstabs?" *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, 18 (1970): 47-126, 231-78. (Baumgart's article is typical in its frank condemnation of the military for running amuck and its reluctance to explode the illusions of the diplomats' power policy.)

beginning to stir into lawlessness and anarchy—and everything is engulfed in such blindness that the whole nation will stumble into the abyss.” The same hubris that had prevented a truly peaceful Eastern policy all too soon made Hohenzollern follow Romanov.⁸³

33. Riezler diary, Sept. 12, 13, 24, and 30, 1918. For a critical conceptual framework regarding the interaction of domestic and foreign components in the disintegration of Wilhelminian Germany see Andreas Hillgruber, “Zwischen Hegemonie und Weltpolitik: Das Problem der Kontinuität von Bismarck bis Bettmann Hollweg,” in M. Stürmer, ed., *Das kaiserliche Deutschland: Politik und Gesellschaft, 1870–1918* (Düsseldorf, 1970); Volker R. Berghahn, “Das Kaiserreich in der Sackgasse,” *Neue politische Literatur*, 16 (1971): 434–506; and my forthcoming book, *The Enigmatic Chancellor: Bethmann Hollweg and the Hybris of Imperial Germany* (New Haven, 1972).